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## **OUTPUTS ARE THE BEST MEASURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY, NOT INPUTS: REGIONAL UNIVERSITIES NETWORK**

A tendency to focus on some limited measures of inputs – such as student eligibility criteria and offer acceptance rates – rather than the end results of tertiary study, does not provide a particularly useful measure of the quality of higher education, according to the Regional Universities Network.

The Chair of RUN, Professor David Battersby, noted that data presented in the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science, Research and Tertiary Education's report Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances 2012, which show that applications made to RUN universities were more likely to receive an offer than applications to other university groupings, were not an indication that higher education quality was being compromised.

"Criticism to this effect is based on the misconception that higher education quality is based on inputs, such as ATAR scores, rather than the outcomes of higher education," Professor Battersby said.

"Higher education at RUN universities transforms lives. It is the end product of tertiary education programs that is important. Inputs, such as ATAR scores that set eligibility criteria for entrance to university for most school leavers, but not the majority of students, are just one starting point.

"Many of the students at RUN universities are mature age and follow a range of pathways to university. Our universities provide enabling courses for students who are less well prepared for university study prior to them taking on undergraduate courses.

"RUN universities are recognised for human capital development through the quality of their teaching and learning outcomes as measured by a range of indicators including student satisfaction. We are among the leaders in teaching to students with diverse needs. Our completion rates are comparable to those at other institutions. Our courses are accredited in the same way as those at other universities.

"We have pioneered higher education access schemes that enable low socioeconomic status, regional and remote students, first-in-family, mature aged and Indigenous students to participate and succeed at university.

"If we were simply to restrict university to those students who achieved high ATAR scores we would not increase the proportion of Australians with higher education and achieve a more productive and competitive Australia. We would entrench the lower educational outcomes in regional Australia which must be addressed for the national good.

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“Regional Australian universities have performed well in the demand driven system, and have made a significant contribution to the Government’s aspiration of raising the level of higher educational attainment. Applications increased to RUN universities in 2012 by 3.1 per cent, the second largest increase for a university grouping – this is a great outcome for regional Australia where the aspiration for university study, and the number of people with a degree, is half or less of that in capital cities.

“The Regional Universities Network (RUN) is committed to increasing the participation at university in regional Australia to enhance regional and national productivity and prosperity.”

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